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Ministry of Health

### **Māori COVID and Cancer Screening Response and Recovery**

Tēna kōrua,

Hei Āhuru Mōwai, the national Māori cancer leadership network, and the Māori Monitoring Equity Group for the National Screening Unit, are very concerned about the recent dramatic decrease in cancer screening for Māori during the COVID pandemic. An urgent response is needed.

Cancer is a leading cause of avoidable deaths and health loss for Māori and a leading cause of inequities in life expectancy between Māori and non-Māori. The recent large and rapid decline in access to cancer screening is likely to have a devastating impact for many whānau and will result in more avoidable breast, cervical and bowel cancer deaths for Māori.

The reduction in access to breast and cervical cancer screening has been greater for Māori than non-Māori.<sup>1</sup> At the end of March 2020 (at the start of the first lockdown); the two-year breast screening rate for Māori was 67% (close to the target 70%).<sup>2</sup> By September 2021, the Māori breast screening rate had dropped 9 percentage points to 58% - which is 12 percentage points below the 70% target rate.<sup>1</sup>

For cervical screening, the three-year screening rate for Māori was 66.8% at the end of March 2020<sup>3</sup> (having declined every year since 2016).<sup>1</sup> The Māori cervical screening rate dropped to 59% by September 2021.<sup>1</sup> Asian and European groups screening rates returned to pre-COVID rates. However, this is not the case for Māori (and Pasifika) with continual declines in cervical screening rates.<sup>1</sup>

These differences in cancer screening rates warn of increases in the already large and unacceptable cancer inequities in Aotearoa. We believe that a planned and adequately resourced response could rapidly improve access to cancer screening for Māori. Further, we believe that development of a Māori specific COVID and cancer screening response and recovery plan is a Te Tiriti o Waitangi requirement. This would allow the Crown and Māori to work together in a co-governance arrangement to quickly identify areas of concern, develop and test solutions, and provide rapid feedback.

We recommend the development of a Māori COVID and cancer screening response and recovery plan be developed in partnership between Hei Āhuru Mōwai, the Māori Monitoring Equity Group, Te Aho o Te Kahu, the National Screening Unit and the Ministry of Health.

This plan should include -

1. An overview of the current state of cancer screening and the projected impact of COVID on cancer screening for Māori.
2. A Māori specific strategy and adequately resourced action plan which includes addressing critical workforce issues.
3. Equity focused reporting and monitoring mechanisms.
4. Equitable resourcing for the development and implementation of this plan.

We are happy to discuss this further and look forward to your response



Dr Nina Scott

Co-Chair



Gary Thompson

Co-Chair / Member MMEG



Moahuia Goza

CEO Hei Āhuru Mōwai

cc:

Diana Sarfati, Tumuwhakarae Te Aho o Te Kahu  
Minister Verrall  
Minister Little  
Minister Henare  
Dame Naida Glavish - Pou Tangata Iwi Chairs  
Te ORA  
Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā

1. Health Quality and Safety Commission. 2021. *A window on quality 2021: COVID-19 and impacts on our broader health system. Part 1: March 2020 to August 2021.* (Accessed from [www.hqsc.govt.nz](http://www.hqsc.govt.nz) - March 30 2022).
2. Ministry of Health. May 2020. *BSA New Zealand District Health Board Coverage Report: period ending 31 March 2020.* Wellington: Ministry of Health. (Accessed from [www.nsu.govt.nz](http://www.nsu.govt.nz) – March 2022).
3. Ministry of Health. April 2020. *NCSP New Zealand District Health Board Coverage Report: period ending 31 March 2020.* Wellington: Ministry of Health. (Accessed from [www.nsu.govt.nz](http://www.nsu.govt.nz) – March 2022).